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SPECIAL INITIATIVES

First Kosovo Identification Cards Issued to People with Disabilities

Three members of local advocacy groups for people with development disabilities were among the first citizens of Kosovo to receive Identification Cards.

On October 10, the Ministry of Internal Affairs issued Identification Cards to nine people from a cross-section of Kosovo society. The inclusion of people with mental disabilities is an acknowledgement of the work of local advocacy groups working to promote human rights, and full and participation of people with mental disabilities in Kosovo society.



Arjeta, member of an advocacy group for people with development disabilities, showing her Identity Card

Speaking on the occasion, the Minister of Internal Affairs, Zenun Pajaziti remarked, "we will do all that is possible to have better, easier and faster services, in the first plan for persons with disabilities, for members of minority communities who have special needs and for all citizens of Kosovo."

Both the Kosovo Mental Disability Rights Initiative (K-MDRI) and Mental Disability Rights International (MDRI) have been lobbying the Ministry of Internal Affairs to institute equitable procedures for Kosovo citizens with disabilities applying for identification cards, thereby helping build an inclusive society accessible to all. K-MDRI and MDRI are partnering on the USAID-funded Strengthening the Participation of People with Mental Disabilities in Kosovo Society activity.

MEDIA AND LEGISLATION

Application of Press Code Reduces Use of Hate Speech

The application of the Press Code used by the print media has reduced the use of hate speech according to the latest survey of journalists' and editors' views of the implementation of the Kosovo Press Code and Press Council.

The Kosovo Press Council was established in 2005 as a mechanism for self-regulation by the print media in Kosovo. It adopted a Press Code that is binding for all print media members of the Press Council. Other categories surveyed show an improvement (especially in newspapers) in "avoiding intrusions and inquiries into individuals' private lives" and in the avoidance "of prejudging of persons charged with criminal offences".

USAID's Kosovo Media Assistance Program developed the survey to measure the levels of satisfaction among journalists and editors in applying the Press Code and the Press Council. The principal purpose of the survey is to monitor the impact of the Code and the Council on journalism in Kosovo and to identify improvements in the print media's professionalism by abiding by the terms of the Code. The surveys began in 2006 and the third in the series was completed in 2008. The sequence of surveys shows the trend of journalists' satisfaction with the working of the Press Code increasing over the last three years, with 48% "positive," "very positive" or "extremely positive" in 2006, increasing to 75% in 2007 and 77% in 2008. Among editors, satisfaction with the Press Code varied but it was still much higher than the journalists and reached 100%.

The survey shows a broad improvement in perceptions about the application of the Code, though there are still concerns about the functioning of the Council. USAID's Kosovo Media Assistance Program was a three-year program implemented by IREX.

Women Parliamentarians Begin Monthly Debates

A year-long monthly TV show beginning this month will feature debates between Kosovo women parliamentarians on issues of public interest.

The show is a joint project of RTV 21 and the Women's Parliamentarian Group. This program will be of particular interest as many of the women parliamentarians are new to politics and not used to television debates. Therefore, the National Democratic Institute (NDI), which implements USAID's Political Party Strengthening activity, designed a two-day workshop to help these parliamentarians improve their public relations skills as they prepare for these TV debates. The trainers focused on developing the communication skills (public and media relations) of the Women's Parliamentary Group members, including techniques for engaging the media and providing on-camera interviews and statements.

The workshop provided intensive on-camera training and instruction particularly on methods of maximizing media opportunities and delivering clear messages. The workshop also included the simulation of a press conference and a TV interview/debate. NDI works closely with the Kosovo Parliament as it encourages parliamentarians to improve their constituency outreach efforts.

LEGAL EDUCATION

Assessing Legal Education in Kosovo

The first Legal Education Reform Index (LERI) examining Kosovo's legal education system was launched on October 22, 2008. This extensive assessment helps monitor progress towards establishing a more adequate, modern legal education system in compliance with international standards.

"Quality legal education is the foundation needed to produce legal professionals who will contribute to the establishment of the rule of law. However, in many countries, the quality of legal education fails to meet international standards, and unfortunately many law school graduates lack the requisite skills to be effective legal professionals," said Patricia Rader, USAID/Kosovo Director at the launch event. "The Legal Education Reform Index, for the first time in Kosovo, presents a detailed snapshot of the state of legal education and progress in implementing contemporary, systemic reforms," she concluded.

Ms. Rader was joined by Mr. Enver Hasani, Rector of University of Prishtina and Hava Bujupi-Ismajli, Dean of the Law Faculty, to commend the importance of the assessment.

The LERI is the first and foremost legal inquiry that draws upon a diverse pool of information to describe a country's legal education system through the prism of international standards and best practices.

The assessment was conducted and presented by the ABA Rule of Law Initiative (ABA/RoLI), USAID's partner in implementing the Legal Profession Development Initiative.

ENERGY PARTNERSHIPS

Establishing New Partnerships

The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on October 28th, 2008 between the Energy Regulatory Office (ERO) and the Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) marks the establishment of a partnership between the two institutions. The goal of the partnership, which is facilitated by the US-based National Association for Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC), is to foster the exchange of ideas and experiences in energy regulation between participating institutions. Under the framework of the partnership, the ICC will draw on its decades of public-utility regulatory experience to offer support to the ERO in developing its institutional and decision-making capacities in market-based public utility regulation.

The signing of the MOU was followed by a series of workshops and facilitated discussions through the rest of the week, with a focus on broad fundamentals of utility regulation and the necessary features of regulatory agencies. Topics included typical structures and technical skills requirements of regulatory agencies, as well as the legal underpinnings of their mandates and authorities. Specific technical discussions also took place on topics such as tariff design, industry un-bundling, and the practice of stakeholder engagement and public participation in the regulatory process.

The MOU was signed by Honorable Ali Hamiti, Chairman of the ERO, Honorable Charles Box, Chairman of the ICC, Ms. Erin Skutsky, Director of International Programs with NARUC, and Patricia Rader, USAID/Kosovo Director, as a witnessing party.

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